

Investigating...

winter

Exciting and educational ways to explore the great outdoors from the Woodland Trust's Nature Detectives...

Falling snowflakes, frosty mornings, icy crystals, mysterious footprints in the snow, dark nights and bright lights – for all these experiences and more winter is a vivid, memorable season for both children and adults alike. While the colder winter months may make staying indoors seem like the most appealing option during nursery hours, cold and snowy weather can make for a whole new range of exciting outdoor activities, creating a wealth of wintry, wild and wonderful memories that children will cherish forever.

To help you get the most from the season, here are some great ideas from the Nature Detectives winter area – all those below, and many more, are available to download at www.naturedetectives.org.uk/winter

Winter Ice Art

Start by embarking on a trip outdoors and look for natural objects such as acorn cups, pine needles and cones. When the children have compiled a reasonable collection of outdoor treasures, head indoors and set the objects out on a table. Choose a couple of the objects and source plastic beakers or shallow containers and some string. Place the objects into the containers with water and a piece of string, then put in the freezer and wait overnight.

The next day, when the objects have frozen, they can be removed from their containers and hung up outside as icy decorations. See if the children can name the encased objects and let them touch the adornments as they melt.

While you're outside, you might want to take a winter wonderland spotter sheet and see how many wintry sights the children can spot when you're out on a snowy adventure. Look for things like fresh snow, icicles, footprints and melting snow, and tick them off on the printable winter wonderland spotter sheet.

Resources:
tinyurl.com/TNwinterspot



Seed Planting

Help children build a cosy home for a hibernating hedgehog. Hunt for natural building materials around the nursery garden or your local wood. These could be things like fallen leaves, logs and sticks. You'll also need a sturdy, weather-proof box to form the main structure of the house. A wooden or plastic crate, turned upside down with a doorway cut out of it would be ideal. Choose a quiet, sheltered corner to build the house in. If it's too exposed to wind the poor creature may be faced with a draught. Cover the box with sticks, creating a sturdy 'teepee' to hold it in place. Remember to leave a gap at the front so that passing wildlife can go in and out whenever they please.

Bricks, log roll, roof tiles and wood make a fantastic entrance for your hedgehog house. Let the children collect as many fallen leaves as you can find, then place the leaves on top of the house, weaving them around the twigs and packing them into any gaps and pat them all down. The leaves provide excellent insulation and keep the hedgehogs warm and sheltered in all weather conditions.

When your house is made, try not to disturb it too much. Talk to the children about why animals hibernate and help them understand what hibernation is. Hibernating animals need to rest and store energy to survive the cold winter months. When they hibernate their body temperature drops and their heart rate and breathing slows down. All this saves energy.

Resources: tinyurl.com/TNhedgehog

Bird Pack

If the wintry weather is particularly bad, there are lots of activities based on the outdoors that will bring some nature-inspired fun indoors. The Nature Detectives 'bird pack' features 25 free printable activity sheets, plus videos and desktop wallpapers to get children excited about bird life. The colouring sheets include templates for a friendly woodland owl, elegant swan and cute duck – let children use their imaginations to paint, stick, colour or collage their template and help them bring their new feathered friends to life. The pack also includes a 'make a bird feeder' activity sheet, explaining how to make a squirrel-proof feeder out of recycled materials such as an old milk or juice carton.

Resources: tinyurl.com/TNbirds



find out more

Nature Detectives offers over a thousand downloadable resources for children, early years practitioners and teachers, all available for free, providing hours of fun that incorporates nature, learning and creativity. Head to www.naturedetectives.org.uk/teach nursery and start your winter fun now.